

Castlemaine Naturalist

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Monthly newsletter of the
Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.



Superb Blue wren

Photo – Noel Young

The Australian Koel in Victoria

Noel Young

Following Geraldine's reporting of a Koel at their Barkers Creek home in late November last year, I attempted to find out more about the general occurrence of this species in Victoria, having assumed it would only be found in the wet sclerophyl forests or rainforest. The Common Koel was adequately described by Geraldine on page 7 of the December 2013 newsletter. It parasitises a variety of host species, but I imagine that in this part of the world, birds that would have to watch their six would include Red Wattlebirds, Orioles, Mudlarks and the like.

A perusal of the Birdline records gives an interesting pattern. The frequency of reports of Koels in Victoria increased from 2 or 3 in 2004/2005 to 34 in 2010. As they are primarily a forest bird, seeking fruit and berries in their diet, textbooks show central Victoria as the western edge of their occurrence. It is obvious from recent records though, that some of them are adapting to urban areas, and many of these sightings (or hearings) are in Melbourne, even in the Botanical Gardens. Another favourite spot is Bendigo, where they have returned every year since December 2004, when the "first sighting in central Victoria" was proclaimed in Strathfieldsaye. By October 2013 the novelty was wearing thin - "He's back. Hopefully not to stay for 3 months again with that incessant calling. Especially if he adopts last years habit of starting at about 2 am." Other records west of Melbourne occur in the Geelong, Ocean Grove, Anglesea area, one south of Heathcote (November 2009), Maldon railway station (December 2009), Castlemaine station (April 2012), and now in December 2013 in Barkers Creek and Castlemaine by Geoff and Geraldine Harris and Ern Perkins.

One can only speculate on reasons for such species movements. My first thought was that the extensive bushfires along the NSW forest country may be a factor this year, but it appears from the Birdline reports that there was a jump in numbers in 2007, (to 22) which has more or less been maintained up till now. It is tempting to say it is yet another result of climate change, but there may be other complicating factors like an increase in the overall population, host species and food availability. 2007 was also the year Kevin Rudd led labour to victory, but I have discounted that.

Bells Swamp excursion, 14 December 2013

Bird list - Noel Young

Apart from the roadside ponds, the swamp was rapidly drying out, leaving a lush crop of grasses and reeds where shallow water had recently lain. Birds species recorded were not a lot less than I had recorded a month before (November 10), though their numbers were greatly depleted.

White-faced Heron
Yellow-billed Spoonbill
White Ibis
Masked Lapwing
Pacific Black Duck
Grey Teal
Little Pied cormorant
Australasian Grebe
Willy Wagtail
Brown Tree-creeper
Mudlark
White-plumed Honeyeater
Superb Blue Wren
Galah
Long-billed Corella
Starling
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike
Magpie
Rufous Songlark
Fan-tailed Cuckoo
Whistling Kite (?)

Plant notes -

Geraldine Harris

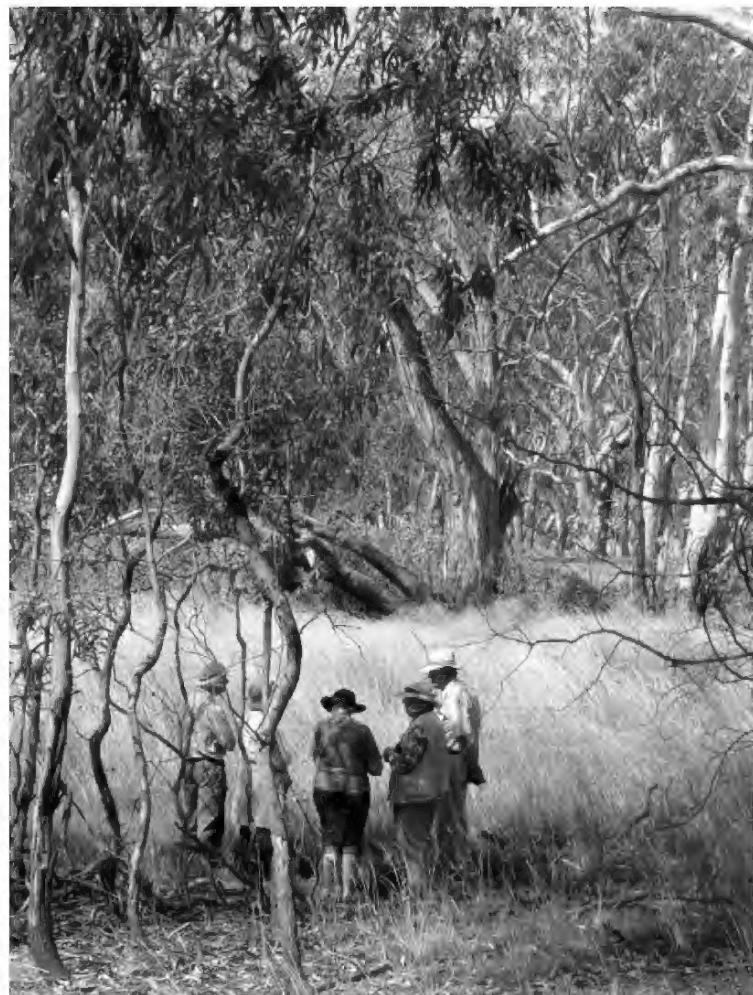
My best guess at identification of the wetland plants growing where the water had receded (over the fence at our last stop) is -

Upright Water Milfoil (*Myriophyllum crispatum*)
Floating Pond-weed (*Potamogeton tricarinatus*)
Small Loosestrife (*Lythrum hyssopifolia*)

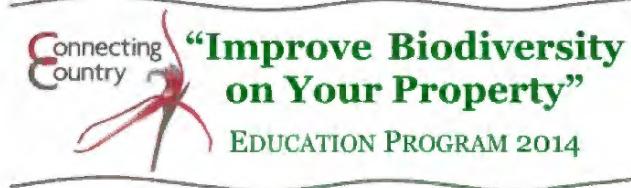
I have not been able to identify the small purple plants with tiny leaves (some looking as though they contained shining drops of water but in fact it was shine on the surface of the leaves).

Other plants we noted were -

Old Man Weed (*Centipeda cunninghamii*)
and a hollow rush which was possibly *Juncus ambilis*



2 March - Ian Lunt Talk in Newstead, Naturally



If you're already familiar with the work of popular ecologist and author Ian Lunt then you probably don't need any further encouragement to attend this free talk in Newstead on Sunday 2nd March.

For those who haven't come across him before, Ian is an Associate Professor in the School of Environmental Sciences at Charles Sturt University, Albury, and the author of popular online blog *Vegetation Ecology for Southern Australia* (<http://ianluntecology.com>). He has been described as "one of the best ecological storytellers going around" and has made appearances on ABC TV's *Catalyst* and *Landline* programs to talk about his research. He's also co-authored the book '*Plains Wandering: Exploring the Grassy Plains of South-Eastern Australia*'.

Ian will be presenting a talk titled "**Natural regeneration in central Victoria: the biggest positive change for conservation in south-east Australia**". Regenerating bush on old farmland is a common sight around Newstead and other parts of the Mount Alexander Shire. Ian's talk should give us an insight into why it's happening and what the impact of it on the environment might be.



The talk will begin at 4:00pm and be followed by a BBQ dinner to celebrate the start of Connecting Country's Improve Biodiversity on Your Property Education Program 2014, supported through funding from the Australian Government's Clean Energy Future Biodiversity Fund.

RSVPs are not essential, but are greatly preferred for catering purposes-

max@connectingcountry.org.au,
or phone 5472 1594

AN EARLY MORNING VISITOR

Nigel Harland

A few days ago Anne and I were having breakfast when we heard a solid bump into a window. These things happen from time to time, for reasons I don't totally understand. We went out slowly and saw a bird of prey sitting beneath our bedroom window. I quickly got my camera and crept slowly up

on the bird. I got a few fairly close up shots, before I decided to lie down on the verandah and get some horizontal shots. As soon as I got the bird in focus it flew away as if nothing had ever happened! I wonder if anyone has any theories on why birds fly into windows?



OWNER – A WHITE-FACED HERON

Rita Mills

Well, that's the impression given. While we were staying at the Riverside Caravan Park in Deniliquin I saw this bird every morning, between about 9 and 12 o'clock, calmly feeding where it suited him (her?), and letting me get within about 20 feet. After that it would just walk off calmly and start feeding a bit further on. I commented on it to the owners of the park, who reckoned that the bird considered himself the real owner and that they were interlopers! And of course, I forgot to take my camera with me except when it wasn't there.



[Well, here is a substitute White-faced Heron - caught about to swallow its lunch on the Loddon river during our excursion to Newstead last November - ED]

PHOTO GALLERY
LATE SPRING IN THE BOTANICAL GARDENS
Noel Young



Above: A Long-necked Tortoise basks in the sun on the island



Right: Great Cormorant on Lake Joanna



New families -

Left: Pacific Black Ducks

Below: Wood Ducks



January observations from Denis Hurley's notebook

January 1: Have noticed very few small birds about - even when setting gentle hose spray late afternoon at their usual visiting shady drinking area!

January 5: ~40 Little Ravens with young about the house each day;
8.30 pm. Small Black Wallaby *Wallabia bicolor* in the front garden.

January 7: Black Wallaby sighted east of the house

January 8:

Two Grey Fantails observed chasing Red Wattlebirds, Crimson Rosella and Spotted Pardalote from the bird bath! Perhaps they were pegging out a cool spot before the hot days arrived.

Birds at Expedition Pass 11:50 am:
Reed Warblers, White faced Heron, Musk Duck, Eurasian Coot

January 10: 9.30 am. Expedition Pass:

Musk Duck, with yabbies in its beak - first time I have seen this in many years of watching (from the kayak); six Eurasian Coots, two Purple Swampheens, a Darter, and a Great Cormorant.

January 13: Expedition Pass reservoir, am. :

Two Wedge-tailed Eagles (overhead), three Purple Swamp-hen (on shore), a White Ibis (flying), one Musk Duck, four Eurasian Coots, one Pied? Cormorant, one Darter, Clamorous Red-warblers 10+, two Pacific Black Duck.

January 17: 9.40 am., A healthy-looking Echidna on Weynton rd.

11 am., Two Wood Ducks on my shrinking dam.

1:30 pm. A juvenile Speckled Warbler being fed by a parent near the bird bath - first sighting of this species for many months. At least four juvenile Red-browed Finch at the feed tray.

5 pm. Silvereye, striated Thornbill, Yellow-faced Honeyeater, and two male Blue Wrens with four hens

January 20: A Blue-banded Bee working grassland Flax-lily *Dianella amoena* in the garden

Expedition Pass at 10 am., a Swamp Harrier

12.30 pm., Merri st. - a Southern Brown Tree frog *Litoria ewingii* in Melaleuca - 1.8 metres from the ground. There is a lot of other activity as well - but I need to prepare lunch.

At 4 pm there was a White-browed Scrubwren *Sericornis frontalis* mostly seen working under the house, checking for spiders and insect prey.

The SEANA autumn camp will be at Marysville 2nd - 5th MAY 2014

Hosted by Upper Goulburn Field Naturalists Club Inc.

Anticipated Highlights include talks on fire recovery projects and Leadbeater's Possum since the fires, and excursions including recovery program sites, Buxton Silver Gums reserve, recovery of Stevenson's Falls, Friends walk in the Cathedral Ranges, Lake Mountain sub-alpine plateau, Myrtle Beeches, a bird observing excursion in the Eildon area, geology excursion to the Cathedrals area, and on the final morning to McKenzie Flora reserve and Mt. Pleasant reserve.

Cabin accommodation at Camp Marysville. Registration should be made ASAP
Look for details on the club table at the coming meeting

Observations

December -

- ◆ Chris Timewell saw a goanna on the west side of Mt. Tarrengower, one metre or more in length
- ◆ Geoff Harris - birds nesting at Barkers Ck; Willy Wagtail, Grey Shrike-thrush, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike and Brown Goshawk. And lots of White-browed Woodswallows about
- ◆ Ern Perkins has noted several White-winged Trillers
- ◆ Geraldine described how she shared the anxiety of the Grey Shrike-thrush parents (nesting near the back door) when their chick left the nest but seemed incapable of flying to a safe spot. Despite the parents attempts at flying lessons, it had to be assisted to safety for the first two or three days and nights
- ◆ Natalie de Maccus was woken during the night when an intruder triggered the sensor lights - turned out to be a couple of feral cats!
- ◆ A discussion followed on trapping cats - traps can be hired from the Council, and dry cat food was said to be a successful lure

January -

- ◆ Numbers of Crested Pigeons around Ross Drive - Kit Morris
- ◆ Trees around home are hosting Cockatoo and Corella roosts, as well as a noisy Galah creche - Rita Mills
- ◆ Saw lots of Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos at Jan Juc - Richard Piesse
- ◆ Musk Lorikeets have made short work of the apples, and the remainder of the fruit is being devoured by Rosellas, Cockatoos and the odd Long-billed Corella. Jan 31 - a pair of Whistling Kites circled low over Happy Valley - Noel Young

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club

Castlemaine Field Naturalists

Coming events

Fri February 14 meeting: AGM Speakers - George Broadway and Noel Young

Sat February 15 field trip: Cairn Curran reservoir

Fri March 14 meeting: speaker to be confirmed

VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB ACTIVITIES

General meetings - (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 7.30 pm.

Field Trips - (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and/or afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.

Business meetings - fourth Thursday of each month, except December, at George Broadways; 24a Greenhill Ave., at 7.30 pm. Members are invited to attend.

Club website - <http://castlemainefnc.wordpress.com/>

Subscriptions for 2013

Ordinary membership: Single \$30, Family \$40

Pensioner or student: Single \$25, Family \$30

Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

2013 Committee

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